

Summary of basic ideas behind the Breaking the Frame gathering

1. Technology is a key factor in our society

In modern western societies almost every activity of life involves technology, and technological infrastructure and capabilities are crucial to the functioning of society. Technology determines what is possible, and so the direction of technological development has a massive impact on the overall development of society: for example, we are now told that we live in an 'Information Society' or 'Network Society'.

2. Technology is political and not 'neutral'

Given the importance of technology, it should be obvious that decisions about eg. which technologies to develop and why are highly political. It is not surprising that those who develop and control technologies (corporations, the military and technocratic elites) use their power to shape technologies in ways that serve their interests and to reinforce the overall industrial capitalist system. The claim that technology is inherently politically neutral is an ideology designed by those elites to obscure a crucial way in which their power operates through technology, and to confuse people and stifle political debate.

One common way of looking at this problem is to say that technology 'can be used for good or bad purposes, the problem is that corporations use it for their own interests'. While this is partly true, the problem has deeper roots: technology also has its own philosophy and power system, which we call technocracy, (see point 4 below). The non-neutrality of modern technology is caused by the fact that technocratic thinking, although it is based on a set of technical concepts separate to those of capitalism, is consistent with it. (In fact, the ongoing development of technocracy often shapes capitalism, eg the Industrial Revolution, Fordism, Post-Fordism.) So, technologies developed by those trained in the technocratic mindset are not neutral and always tend in the same direction. Saying this does not mean that 'all modern technology is bad', or that it does not have genuine benefits for society.

3. Radical movements need to get a grip on the politics of technology – especially in the current environmental crisis

A radical politics that really aims to get the measure of oppression and exploitation in our society and the causes of environmental problems needs to overcome the myths of technological neutrality and progress. There are many forms of power in our societies, but we need to focus more on the ways in which the technological structuring of the world operates, and the lack of significant democratic control over that. A key aspect of technocratic power is the way such elites develop technologies, and then present us with *faits accomplis*. This leaves radical movements repeatedly scrambling to deal with the environmental and social problems technologies cause, through single-issue campaigns. Breaking the Frame aims to develop a proactive approach that addresses the root causes of those problems.

The environmental crises (climate change, biodiversity collapse, resource shortages) are caused by 200 years of industrial capitalism. They are due just as much to the technocratic philosophy of domination and control of nature (as expressed in industrialism) as to the capitalist imperatives of maximising profits and economic growth. If we are to transition to a sustainable and economically just society, this will necessarily involve a radical rethink about which technologies are appropriate and how we take decisions about that.

4. Technocracy is a system of power and a philosophy of order based on technological domination of nature

Technocracy, the cultural and philosophical system of modern technology, originates in the 17th century Scientific Revolution, and is based on the maxim of its key philosopher, Francis Bacon: Knowledge is Power. The aim of technocracy is to control nature, ostensibly for the benefit of everyone, and to create social order. It has a series of key concepts: eg. materialism/mechanistic understanding of nature, efficiency, uniformity, rationalisation, automatic control, etc.. In technocracy, the smoothly functioning machine is the ideal to be striven for. Technocracy tends to force nature to conform to these concepts, rather than respecting natural limits and working with the way that nature is structured.

Over the last 400 years the unfolding of technocracy through industrialism has shaped nature and human society, and the ways that capitalism and the state operate. Both nature and society have been deformed as a result, with consequences (such as the environmental crisis) that have now become critical. The attempt to manage society by technocratic methods results in a dehumanised world in which human needs are subordinate to systems and bureaucracies. But instead of basically changing its approach, technocracy responds with new generations of more extreme technofixes for the problems it has caused – psychiatric drugs and surveillance for society, synthetic biology and geoengineering of nature.

5. Fighting for better understanding and democratic control

Through comparing the insights and analysis of different campaigning movements, and deepening our understanding of technocracy, we aim to create a more adequate politics of technology. We aim to strengthen existing campaigns and launch new campaigns. Amongst the principles of a new politics of technology are:

- Opposition to technologies that are 'hurtful to Commonality' (i.e. to the common good, including the environment) and to 'technofixes' for social problems;
- Support for technologies that satisfy real human needs and empower the powerless e.g. some renewable energy technologies;
- Technology should be developed under democratic control, rather than under the control of private interests and the military.